

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



### City of Duluth Communications Office

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**DATE: 1/25/2022**

**SUBJECT: City and partners create first of its kind reward fund to bring MMIWg2S People Home**

**BY: Kate Van Daele, Public Information Officer**

#### City and partners create first of its kind reward fund to bring MMIWg2S People Home

[Duluth, MN] The City of Duluth in partnership with the Native Lives Coalition, and Mending the Sacred Hoop announced the creation of the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag “They Are Remembered Forever” Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit (MMIWg2S) People Reward Fund today, January 25, at a press conference at City Hall. The fund is the first of its kind in providing funds as an incentive for information leading to the arrest or conviction of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit people.

The Fund was routed through City Council and approved on January 10, 2022. Originally inspired by the open case of Sheila St. Clair, the Indigenous-led fund was established to help law enforcement agencies solve violent crimes against Indigenous women, girls, and two spirit peoples.

“This Indigenous-led and grassroots fund has been established to fill a really important gap to help us address injustices, and allowing law enforcement agencies to solve these violent crimes against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people, while bringing justice and healing to our region” Alicia Kozlowski, Community Relations Officer said. “This is not only an Indigenous issue. This is a community issue. This is a human issue. We don’t want to be invisible anymore because that’s how we disappear.”

“It is an honor to have this group come together,” Rene Ann Goodrich, founder of the Native Lives Matter Coalition said. “It’s an honor. It’s powerful, and it’s just the beginning of a larger campaign that we hope to bring throughout the Great Lakes.”

“This is not a fund that is available anywhere else. This is not a fund that you can write to a foundation or the federal government and get a big grant,” Katy Eagle, Executive Director of Mending the Sacred Hoop said. “These are the dollars that can go to families to give them hope. To give them a chance at information and resolving cases. So many members of our community don’t have the resources to call forward information or to get closure. We want to give them the opportunity to have that.”

Mending the Sacred Hoop serves as a fiscal agent for the Fund. The Fund is now accepting financial donations. Those interested in donating can write checks to the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Reward Fund by sending them to Woodlands National Bank at 240 North Rd, Cloquet, MN 55720. Donations can also be made online at the following link <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/mmip2sfund>.

Donations have already been made by the City of Duluth, Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, and by an anonymous donor for a total of \$6,500. The coalition set an initial fundraising goal to raise \$10,000 with hopes to surpass that goal to assist with future cases. The funds will be used for active cases originating in Duluth and involving an Indigenous woman, girl, or two-spirit person. The funds will be used as an incentive that leads to the arrest or conviction in open and active cases.

“This money doesn’t bring people back, but it lets people know that there is value in them opening up and sharing with us,” Mayor Emily Larson said. “We are asking people to come forward and share information that is probably terrifying and scary and something that they don’t want to revisit. The money doesn’t pay them off. The money doesn’t make their emotional well-being whole, but is a recognition that there is tremendous value.”

Heart Berry, a local Indigenous owned-business announced today that it will donate all of its proceeds on Saturday, January 29 to the fund. For more information or to make a purchase visit <https://www.heartberry.com/>.

The coalition is looking for additional businesses and groups to collaborate with in an effort to grow the awareness of the fund, and to increase donations. For more information on how to add your voice to this cause, please contact Mending the Sacred Hoop at [www.mshoop.org](http://www.mshoop.org) or follow the Gaagige-Mikwendaagoziwag Facebook page.

The fund provides a tool that community members and law enforcement agencies hope will bring closure and solves cases.

“What we didn’t have previously was a reward, and the reward is important for people to share information for people who are terrified, who often times need to have an influence to share that information,” Duluth Police Chief Mike Tusken said. “This is a resource that we never had and may give us that missing piece that we need to solve this case and bring Sheila home.”

If you have any information about the disappearance of Sheila St. Clair please call the Duluth Police Department's Violent Crimes Unit at (218) 730-5050.

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